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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [AG](#)
SUBJECT: COMBINED ELECTIONS AND VOTER TURNOUT

REF: A. ALGIERS 109

[1](#)B. ALGIERS 30
[1](#)C. ALGIERS 129

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The heads of two parties in the ruling coalition have publicly opposed Prime Minister Belkhadem's plan to hold simultaneous local and parliamentary elections. One opposition party told us Belkhadem's plan was aimed at maximizing the electoral success of his party, the FLN. No date for a combined election has yet been announced, but constitutional requirements suggest the poll will occur before June. Whatever the date, an independent observer and the youth coordinators of all but one of the major political parties tell us that they expect higher youth turnout than during the last national parliamentary elections five years ago. The one dissenting voice, from the moderate Islamist MSP, believes youths are not much interested in the upcoming elections. All our interlocutors generally agree that youths are more likely to cast ballots in local than national elections, since local issues (local development, unemployment, housing and infrastructure) are of greater importance to them. End Summary.

WHEN ARE THE ELECTIONS?

[1](#)2. (U) Although the precise dates for local and national elections this year have not been set, observers have expected parliamentary elections in May and local polls in October. Under Article 102 of the Algerian constitution, the term of current MPs in the lower house expires on May 30. But the three presidential coalition parties have not yet agreed on when to hold the elections. National Democratic Rally (RND) party head Ahmed Ouyahia said in late January he favored strict adherence to the constitution in scheduling parliamentary elections. Abouguerra Soltani, head of the Movement for a Society of Peace (MSP) party, has said that the FLN, headed by Prime Minister Abdelaziz Belkhadem, does not have the right to dictate the date of the next parliamentary elections. For his part, Belkhadem has publicly called for holding both local and parliamentary elections simultaneously -- without proposing a timetable.

[1](#)3. (C) FLN MP Sabah Bonour told us Belkhadem favored holding the parliamentary and local elections together in the spring so that the FLN could devote its resources to mobilizing voters for a referendum on constitutional changes expected later in the year. She argued that Belkhadem was right to do so because holding two elections at the same time would save both time and resources. In contrast, Islah ("Reform") and other opposition parties favor separate elections (ref A).

Islah MP Saadi Abdelghafour told us Belkhadem had calculated that combining two elections was the best way for the FLN to repair the many cracks revealed in its local party apparatus during the recent Senate election (ref B), while at the same time making gains at the local level.

HIGH YOUTH TURNOUT EXPECTED

14. (C) Lost so far in the public debate on combining the elections is discussion of how doing so would affect turnout, especially for youth. Brahim Bouleggane, secretary general of the General Union of Algerian Students (UNEA), one of the most influential student organizations in Algeria, told us in late January that he expected high youth turnout in both the local and national elections, regardless of their timing. Compared to the last parliamentary elections five years ago, Bouleggane claimed that youths between the ages of 25 and 35 were now more involved in the political process, both as voters and as candidates. He also believed that the prominence of financial and corruption scandals (ref C) would spur younger voters to cast a ballot, albeit probably more so in local than in parliamentary elections. This was because, he said, Algerians of all ages attach greater importance to addressing local issues, especially the provision of services such as electricity and water.

15. (C) Brahim Salah, National Secretary for Youth Activities for the Berber opposition party RCD, predicts high turnout for youth and female voters, who have become more aware of their political rights. He told us recently that MPs were distant figures for most voters and that local elections would attract more interest. That said, he noted that youths had generally shown more interest in parliamentary elections this year than in previous election years. Tayeb Bengouya, who is responsible for energizing the youth for Islah, told us in early February that youth turnout would be "relatively high" in the next local and legislative elections. He said if political parties focused their campaigns on addressing issues of local development, unemployment and housing, the turnout across the country -- for youth and others -- would be even higher. FLN spokesman Said Bouhedja similarly predicted high youth turnout, primarily for local elections. Bouhedja told us that the fact that a score of elected officials emerges from any given local poll, as opposed to a single MP in parliamentary voting, gave voters a sense of greater empowerment at the local level.

A DISSENTING VOICE

16. (C) The National Secretary in Charge of Youth at MSP, the only party official willing to offer predictions grounded in specific figures, told us recently that he predicted turnout of 15 percent for individuals under age 30 in local and parliamentary elections and 40 percent for "youths" between 30 and 39 years of age. Translated into terms of lower or higher turnout, Abdelhalim Abdelouhab said voters in general, youths included, were not very interested in the upcoming elections -- especially the parliamentaries. Abdelouhab attributed this to voters knowing that MPs are not fully scrutinizing the conduct of state institutions and that most laws are enacted by presidential decree, not by parliament. He agreed with his counterparts at other political parties, however, in maintaining that turnout for local elections would be higher than for parliamentary elections.

AND THE KABYLIE?

17. (C) We asked the above political party contacts for their predictions on youth turnout in the Kabylie in particular, since legislative elections were not held in the predominantly Berber region five years ago. MSP said turnout there would be low. RCD, which expects to score well in this region, noted that turnout in the Kabylie could go nowhere but up, since this time voters would not be prevented from voting. The FLN believed turnout would be higher than

exQcted, because the voters in the Kabylie wanted their share of national economic wealth for development.

18. (C) COMMENT: The major political parties agree that Algerian youths are more likely to participate in local than national elections. Young Algerians may well see local government as more relevant than parliament to addressing the problems of their daily lives, even though centralized control limits the ability of local councils to change things. Following similar "all politics is local" reasoning, FLN MPs tell us they expect their party to do well in parliamentary elections because voters see the FLN as best positioned to direct national resources to defined local areas. Prime Minister Belkhadem might not be amiss in thinking that combining the local and national polls will improve turnout generally, and for his FLN in particular. The challenge for all the parties, especially in a country where more than 70 percent of the population is under 30, is proving to younger voters that the outcome of any election is relevant to their daily lives. We're not seeing a lot of evidence so far that they have succeeded.

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